

My first lesson in weakness evangelism

by Johnny Long

I took my Sikh neighbor out to dinner specifically to share the Gospel with him. He is a wealthy man with an international contracting business, and I was nervous. We had become good friends and I wanted him to keep liking me, but the Gospel might ruin that! I begged the Holy Spirit for wisdom. On a previous occasion, he had asked me outright if I had come to Africa "to convert people to Christianity." (His family's stated view is that "Everyone should stay in the religion into which he was born.") I said yes, and that I certainly wished he would become a Christian, but that my main work in Kenya was to train pastors to not repeat all the mistakes I had made as a Christian and a minister. That piqued his interest, and after a follow-up question or two, I promised to take him out to dinner (at the restaurant of his choice - at my expense) so we could chat about it.

A few weeks later we found ourselves in the dining room of the Ibis Grill at the Norfolk Hotel in downtown Nairobi. With its two French chefs resident, it promised to be a sumptuous (and expensive) meal. I silently thanked God for my donors who would be footing the bill!

After sharing that my work was training ministers not to repeat my mistakes, he was as we say, "all ears" to hear the juicy details. I explained that he needed some background about how I came to faith and what happened subsequently to get me in a mess. I told him about my childhood as an unwilling church-goer, my drunken rebellion in university, my expulsion from the school, and how at the next school I was hounded by Christians (whom I hated) who ceaselessly prayed for me to join their faith. I explained how I wanted to be my own lord, and resisted the messages that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, had come to earth to lay down his life on the cross for a sinners like me.

Indeed I was a sinner—self-centered, self-loving, self-serving breaker of God's law that told me I should love the God who created me with all my heart and my fellow man as myself.

I told him of my surrender to Jesus Christ in January 1962, of the huge effect that had on my conduct—even feeling God was calling me to abandon my medical studies to serve him as a missionary.

But, I explained, although I had begun my Christian life well, I had fallen into the trap of using the ministry for my own glory—stealing for myself the praise due unto God alone. I told him how grieved I was that I had done *this* to the Son of God who had come down to die on the cross for me, was raised from the dead for me, and who had ascended back to the right hand of God the Father to constantly pray for me and cover me, the sinner, with his righteousness, making me beautiful to God the Father. I asked him if he'd ever known anyone who was raised from the dead. He hadn't. I told him that this Jesus would come again—this time as the Judge of all the earth. I could hardly believe the boldness with which I shared all of this—nor could he. We "Europeans" aren't known for our repentances.

All this was said in-between bites of "medallions of impala," and so came out quite naturally— despite the pounding of my heart. Toward the end of my "repentance," I looked up from my plate to see big tears rolling down his face. He opened up his heart and began to tell me about the awful arguments he was having with his wife. He asked if we could discuss these things with her. He explained that the two of them were "very religious," but that they felt "very lost." He didn't mean "Christian lost," but it was an amazing admission nonetheless. That was in 1995. Three years and more than a half-dozen encounters later (and many tearful prayers for his salvation), he has not yet become a believer. But he still has the NIV Bible I gave him in 2001. In the back is a personal letter in my own hand, clearly outlining the plan of salvation. He is always eager to get together, but it is the Holy Spirit that must open his heart. What can I do? I can keep sharing my *daily* need of Jesus with him, and as I do, use that to press home *his* need for Jesus and the forgiveness of his sins.

UPDATE January 2007 - My wife Becky and I visited my friend and his family while we were on a teaching trip to Nairobi, Kenya. The Lord

